



HOT TIME: SUMMER ON THE ESTATES '80S + '90S URBAN RIOTS IN THE U.K.



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The UK has for some time enjoyed a high level of class warfare - compared to, say, the US. The readiness of its workers to strike has been referred to as "the English disease." In the 1970s this virus peaked in the '78-79 "Winter of Discontent." It resurfaced again in the Thatcher years with the '84-85 miners' strike, but the form of attack the minority of the working class that struggles there has chosen more often than not has been rioting. The 1980s witnessed two major waves of mass proletarian violence in the streets. In '81, some 80 different towns and cities saw combat. '85-86 again saw numerous incidents of looting, arson and battles with police, as well as some heavy strike action. The '90s got off to a rousing start with the Battle of Trafalgar Square, a gigantic anti-Poll Tax demonstration which leaped from protest to assault, trashing and looting the posh West End of London. The explosion tore at the heart of the British establishment - right at the doorstep of No. 10 Downing Street where Margaret Thatcher cowered in terror. She was removed from office later that year, largely due to massive non-payment of that brutal tax. The Trafalgar Square riot was 3 years ago, but as this essay shows, class war (not "Class War" [the name of a long-running UK-wide federation of anarchist groups- publisher's note]) has been ongoing. BM Blob, the authors, have written about all these struggles and more, producing a number of thick pamphlets throughout the last decade.



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AFTERWORD

In many ways though, despite this out of control, "free market" automatic pilot omnipresence, the UK is also facing one of the gravest crises in its history. No other ideological form is holding anywhere. Those recuperative agencies keeping the working class in place - the trade unions (also militant unionism), community politics/single issues and Labour leftism collapsed and shattered merely a short moment before the real powers-that-be in the nation-state also began to enter the same shattering process. Firstly, the monarchy, with all the implications vis-a-vis Royal prerogatives, the settlement of 1688 and the system of deference in the UK which was the underpinning allowing the new deference to the vodaphone-carrying, designer-gear, Essex (con)man to really take off. Secondly, the disarray in the Church of England now, as one of the country's biggest landowners, on the brink of economic bankruptcy. Thirdly, the Tory party is constantly trembling on the verge of civil war. This disintegration can only get deeper. In many ways the ideological buttresses of the UK nation state are now so weak that, it seems, it wouldn't take much from a really determined group of workers to really cave its head in and inspire all those at the sharp end everywhere to move, too. The trouble is that disintegration is in the heart of the protagonist also, and that's the vicious circle that must be broken. On the October 21st demo for the miners, the largest on a weekday in 20 years, it wouldn't have taken much to have changed things dramatically. Instead of going along with the Trade unions' ritualistically stupid march through Kensington past the antiques shops, all workers had to do was quietly desert the demo and take a nice stroll on a sunny day to Parliament where a massed illegal presence would have resulted in a helluva battle with the police. A chain reaction would have gone off everywhere. These workers, well knowing that trade unionism was just about dead and buried, nonetheless, like the living dead themselves, went along with the funeral march in just the way the establishment - at the end of its tether - wanted!

-January '93

involved in getting the estate's residents to write poems, plays, etc, to combat severe cases of depression and alleviate a more general sense of hopelessness. Drowning people will clutch at anything and some of the residents doubtless are grateful because, at least, they are being shown some attention, proving to the unfeeling world outside they are worthy, deserving citizens. However, given the grim facts, it is about as unfortunately believable as discussing the texture of Bonnard's paintings when the trumpets of doom are sounding and this effort to attract charitable attention must turn against the hard questions any overthrowing of the status quo involves. Class War, having no critique of art, praised "Dream On" as working class culture instead of savaging it as the miserable bit of recuperative junk it is. (On a more positive note, women from the estate formed a group to deal with depression - without professional guidance - and it would be interesting to know what came of it.)

Despite the fact that the economy is in the midst of the worst recession since the 30s, a "contained depression," one bordering on slump (interesting to note how psychiatric jargon used to describe aberrant mental states is now being applied to the economy), free market triumphalism continues unabated oblivious to the fact that the free market has all but ground to a halt. The enterprise culture is dead, long live the enterprise culture! What is really depressing is how deep-seated this view still can be. A few weeks ago we got talking to a British Telecom engineer originally from the Caribbean. He reckoned that BT's recently announced redundancy (layoffs) program was a covert way of casualizing the work force by buying out job security. He then made the astonishing claim that now is the best time to set up in business!

English pragmatism belongs to the far distant past and the threadbare ideology of privatization still tunes most pulpits as we descend ever deeper into a privatized hell. The breach opened by the great poll tax protest and which was largely responsible for Thatcher's dismissal has, for the moment, been patched over. For how long? But for that to change a lot more will be needed than sporadic urban explosions even though they burst out continuously, and even if one still hopes they portend something a lot more dramatic.

-Late Summer '92.

RIOTS IN THE U.K., 1991-92

Over the last year, from the summer of 1991 onwards, the UK has erupted in a fresh bout of urban rioting. This time it's not only confined to England but has spread to Wales and more recently, Scotland. Even the Republic of Ireland has had its troubles with disturbances on Dublin's north side and south side (Fatima Mansions), and also in Cork City. It's not the same as the last major outburst in 1985, nor is it anything like 1981. July '81 was an expression of the decaying inner cities and instigated by black youth. The solidarity of black youth, dragging whites in their wake, was again to the fore in 1985 but this time its most ferocious expression emanated from those estates built in the late '60s/early '70s. The kind of point-block, concrete jungles of the Loughborough estate in Brixton and especially Broadwater Farm in north London which in the '70s even received some bullshit architectural award. But by 1992, continuing this urban drift, rioting has become largely an expression of the ubiquitous low-rise modern estate but with one big difference: the vast majority of the protagonists are white youth. There've been the same vandalistic sprees with youth attacking police, hurling fire bombs, looting, and setting fire to shops. Derelict buildings have been torched, schools and council housing offices set ablaze - even law courts and police stations firebombed. Most have been occasioned by some incident, often a death, related to police pursuing joy-riders. In that sense it's more like the riots in France in the early '80s.

It's been pretty extensive. Riots have taken place in cities like Cardiff, Oxford, Newcastle, Sunderland, Leeds, Coventry and Bristol and in towns such as Burnley, North Shields, Blackburn, Salford, Carlisle, Huddersfield, Stockton and Middlesbrough, Luton and Dunfermline, and county towns in leafy Shropshire such as Wellington and Telford. During the first seven months of '92, there've been, almost everywhere, countless heavy incidents involving brick and bottle throwing aimed at the cops, which, except locally, are hardly reported. In fact, news of riots has generally been suppressed. Until the Hartcliffe estate exploded on the outskirts of Bristol in June '92, press coverage over the past months has been minimal. Princess Di's suicide attempts were far more important. But the sudden

explosion of fury, simultaneously in West Yorkshire and Lancashire, in early July, briefly made the riots headline news. Even so, disturbances involving fire raising and molotoving police had been going on for days in Burnley. About the same time, extensive trouble on a Luton estate, 35 miles north of London, wasn't even mentioned until it had been quelled 5 days later. And so on. Of course, Newcastle in September '91 was so dramatic and big that everyone knew about it and the media gave up on its familiar blanking.

The Los Angeles uprising in the Spring had a slight effect in England - there were sort of "solidarity" troubles in Bolton and elsewhere in Lancashire. Amusingly, there was an outburst in Oulton Broad, Norfolk where youths in an idyllic pastoral setting of fen and bullrushes went on a rampage shouting, "LA, LA." But the real nitty gritty lay elsewhere.

SCIENCE FICTION

Generally rioting has taken place on estates rather different in character to those dominated by point-blocks which were at the center of the autumn storm of '85. Riots have broken out on those dispersed estates (in terms of housing design) where two-up/two-down semi-detacheds are interspersed with low-rise flats and, more often than not, were built in a slightly earlier period. In short, those estates which were part of a socially conceived plan aiming vaguely at some kind of "abolition of the working class" through the guidance of "benevolent" social democratic ideals, which even the now-lapsed one-nation Toryism of the '50s/early '60s Macmillan era subscribed to.

So much for the ideal! Even when they were being built reality gave the lie to this unworldly, unworkable, social democratic crap. But reality now couldn't be much farther from the ideal. Consensus? The end of the working class? Well, yes, in terms of no work. What a laugh! Generally these areas are now desolate. The red brick has faded, frequently blighted by spalling, and the paint has cracked off years ago. Many houses are boarded up, having become prey to damp and general neglect. Many gardens have become abandoned and overgrown, and the green lawn nothing but bare, windswept clay on which a few blighted trees struggle to survive. Litter and refuse

successful strike - something that might stop the passing of ever more fearsome laws aimed at subduing already very subdued workers. This process of gradual attrition of workers' rights is part of a wider process of softening-up so that people finally will accept terrible catastrophe without a murmur - even be glad of it because death brings to an end a vain struggle against hopeless odds. At this point in time, the UK State is abandoning, bit by bit, all forms of intelligent, corporatist state control. Even formal logic has to be done in. The government is committed to zero inflation, yet at the same time it desperately wants to see house price inflation back once more - even though it would figure in the retail price index as inflation! And this is one of the reasons it is mercilessly attacking the "new age" travellers and their growing - often unwelcome - entourage of footloose youth, some from the estates. In the State's eyes, this form of homelessness is not helping the housing market to recover. The poor must be made to purchase even though they have nothing to purchase with. The perversity is epic in scale, recalling the lunatic demands of biblical tyrants. Any leanings in the direction of broadly-based recuperative projects have been stamped on. The government-sponsored inner-cities initiative following the '81 riots which was an important factor in the yuppification of many inner city neighborhoods and an object lesson in how State intervention helps the "free" market, was the last large-scale effort of its kind.

Sure there are minor examples. Some government money has gone to riot-torn estates. One wonders what effect this may have on tenants' committees landed with the job of getting untrained estate youth into doing building work on wrecked housing stock, like has just happened on Stockton's Ragworth? On another, "cultural" level, Amber Films in Newcastle tried to break into the major cinema circuits with their sub-Meyerhold film "Dream On" about the Meadow Well estate which mixed residents and actors. Made before the riot the grand opening in the Odeon, Newcastle, was attended by chain-bearing civic dignitaries and Gazza, the international footballer star, idiot Tory and classic Geordie fruit and nut case. Even in spite of the nimble footwork, the film has bombed leaving Amber Films with massive debts. So, at least, this attempt to capitalize on the rioters has failed. The Amber Films collective has also been

more playful aspects of joy-riding tend to go by the board; it has to be put within the context of the work-a-day world. A police chase. A car crash. Several injured. A death - it's viewed more as an industrial accident in an engineering plant like close-by Reyrolles, or a pit disaster at Easington colliery. To call for a sympathy strike in such a situation is perfectly logical - even if it did fall on deaf ears.

That said, a lot of fully employed workers and unemployed aren't very keen on joy-riders. Sometimes it's their car that gets nicked or they worry they might be next. And mums tend to hate the activity as little children can get run over. Indeed, the only demonstration in the Newcastle area has been a counter-demonstration, when working class mums blocked the Scotswood Road in protest at a child's death blamed on joy-riders just days before the adjacent Elswick area exploded.

To end on a sombre note. Despite the present bout of urban rioting in the UK the general feeling is that it's not going to make that much difference to anything because the Monster State of free market totalitarianism just isn't going to budge. The riots of '81 were an exhilarating breakthrough; '85 less so, but with a tremendous ferocity compensating for other failings. But now, after such intense combativity having failed... just where can they go? ...and how can they possibly impact on the workplace when the laws against fully employed workers taking any kind of aggressive, challenging action are so hemmed-in by the most draconian anti-worker legislation in Europe, east or west? Anyone instigating wildcat strikes can be made to pay up for profits lost to the company, council dept, or whatever, during the time of the dispute. That can mean a poor worker having to fork out millions of pounds! This vicious act by the State was in response to the rank'n'file union coordination movement of '88. So far the law hasn't been used against workers, but it was deployed against some Bradford students who went on a rent strike. The courts took everything off them minus the clothes on their backs. In short, it's a climate of money terrorism far worse than (what we thought at the time) was the inflexible monetarism of a decade.

People generally are a bit lack-lustre about the rioting, glad it's happening but not getting the same lift from it as before. Without sounding leftist, most would prefer to see a really hard-hitting and

accumulate everywhere and, here and there, the odd junkie's needle which never seems to get cleared away. Diseases like dysentery which were supposedly obliterated have returned. (This happened recently on Bradford's Buttershaw estate.) The new industry of small firms and warehousing which in some cases developed on the fringe of towns and often spread alongside the estates has, for the last decade, suffered the drawn-out traumas of restructuring which, so often in the UK, is a coded word for gradual closure. As for middle class residents, they're nowhere to be seen.

Well, that's Bleak House estate writ large. It's far more complex, though the above description is true for a majority of them. Some still look quite presentable and cared for. Bristol's Hartcliffe estate, for example, is noted for its pleasant disposition and amenities - but that didn't save it from an uprising.

ISLANDS OF US, SEAS OF THEM

The rioting in Huddersfield over the last 10 years highlights this geographical displacement. In '81 it took place fairly near the city center among the old style stone terraced housing of Fartown and right next to the ironically but appropriately named Red Doles heavy industry estate. In '85, it occurred further out in the same direction on the modern, mainly lowrise, small flat complex of the Sheepridge. In '92 rioting has broken out even farther away, on the fairly hilly, semi-detached Brackenhall estate on the edge of town. Coventry in May '92 had a similar trajectory, but moving in the opposite direction where, in the space of 10 days, disorder spread from the outer city Wood End estate to Willenhall, ending up on inner-city Hillfields.

When describing just how broken down these estates are now and where council maintenance is virtually nonexistent (what with the closure of Direct Labour Departments, competitive tendering, and more importantly, government imposed cash starvation), there's a danger of falling into indignation-of-neglect fairly typical of the intellectuals' Guardian newspaper or Channel 4 news. It's just too surface. Behind the decrepit facade there is nonetheless a real community totally unlike the prissy inter-class community envisaged by the planners and far richer in life than the usual surrounding areas

of pretty pretty suburbia, which invariably is the genuine Desolation Row. It's real in the sense of time-honored working-class values of neighborliness, friendship, and simply helping each other out - which usually means a lot of the time. You've only to chance on one of these many lost estates on a bus ride on a hot summer's day and you're immediately struck by the wealth of street life. Doors are open, kids all over the place, adults hanging around talking to each other. Then the bus passes on... back into typical suburbia where an occasional ghost appears at the window and cars drive by empty of occupants save a faceless driver. It's rather like some form of class oriented passport control.

This sense of urban separation - of islands in a sea of middle class, managerial hypocrisy and conformity - undoubtedly has strengthened among estate residents the feeling of a discriminated-against togetherness the more these estates have physically fallen apart. It even happens on estates in old time working-class areas. Recently our building gang worked on the Elgin estate in west London (supposedly, according to the newspapers, as "experts") sealing in the dangerous blue and brown asbestos which seemed to be everywhere in the structure. Such cosmetic remedy was Westminster City council's cheapo way of getting round the costly ripping-out of asbestos after the "Daily Mirror" tabloid had recently headlined the estate on its front page as "The Point Blocks of Death." In fighting the council, the multi-cultural poor tenants (some of whom are surely going to die from asbestosis) had broken out of their isolation and had gotten friendly with each other. We found out that, as a happy byproduct of this new bond of togetherness against a hostile council, mugging - which the estate was notorious for - had simply disappeared. Although this is still an utter rarity on big city housing complexes, it does seem that something similar is happening on those estates lost in the suburban wasteland.

CLASS WARMTH

In the recent rioting on these estates solidarity has been palpable. Although it's only a couple of hundred or more youths involved, possibly a majority of the people on the estates have been sympathetic

productive. We've even heard tell of northern Asian gangs asking for a light from a stranger, then mugging them if they had a southern accent. Fact or lurid phantasy? Whatever, it does further pinpoint the complex character of UK racism. Finally, it must be clearly said that one hopes the psycho-slob moments in the Newcastle uprising aren't going to be repeated in other future city-wide rebellions and that the "reasons" behind these incidents relate purely to the locality. But whatever optimism about the solidarity experienced on the far-flung estates must be severely tempered when considering the inner cities.

WORK VS. JOY

But what impact has the new bout of rioting had on the rest of alienated society? Their actions have left some impression but it's not as obvious as before. The urban rioting of '81 did have an effect on subsequent strikes - an immediate willingness to resort to violence and looting (the printers, miners, Silentnight workers etc), although this must be placed in the context also of the bosses' sheer brutal intransigence at the time - an intransigence which in many respects is even heavier now, but which hasn't, as yet, really been put to the test. One hopeful sign. Immediately after the deaths of the two joy-riders killed in a high speed cop car race and which sparked the violence on the Meadow Well estate in North Shields in Sept '91, there was a call from some of the areas' youth for a work stay-away as a mark of respect. North Shields is right at the center of what's left of the engineering and ship-building industries on the river Tyne. Whether individual workers heeded the call or not, it's difficult to say.

In some ways it wasn't such an unrealistic thing to call for. A lot of the youth, remember, have no money at all - as stated previously. In many ways they are forced into activities like the Newcastle invention of ram-raiding vans into security shutters across store fronts, then doing a hit and run with the goodies - merely in order to survive. Tyneside has never come out of the recession which started in the early '70s, and off-the-cards "scrounge" work whilst signing on the dole has got more and more difficult to find. Ram-raiding has consequently become damned hard work, a substitute for grafting in heavy industry which the area not-so-long-ago was noted for. The

SAVAGE PSYCHO HAPPENINGS

Add to this the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne uprising of Sept '91 and you've got an even odder mix. It was the biggest city-wide rebellion since Liverpool in 1981, though it lacked the splendor and on-going character of that great event on the Mersey. Many Newcastle suburbs erupted - with schools, council offices, housing departments, and law courts attacked. Even a police station was firebombed in Blaydon-on-Tyne.

Newcastle is predominantly white, unlike most other English cities. Like the rest of the northeast, Newcastle hardly considers itself a part of England but equally doesn't know if it belongs anywhere else either. It's an identity crisis that goes back centuries to pre-industrial days when the terrain was bandit country between England and Scotland and you never knew who was friend or foe. And so it's gone on: an identity loss instilling a heightened paranoia. Just who's having a go at you? - is that tree or lamp post about to attack? - just who's rub-off list are you on? Ask any resident or long-term visitor and they'll quickly tell you about some ludicrous, Geordie-psycho incident directed against them by some youth who's attacked them for no reason at all. And true to type in the Newcastle riots, there were some savage psycho happenings like people getting bottled, chipped with razors, women getting thumped, etc. Perhaps the Geordie nutting/head-banger response was even intensified in the riot. The media loved all this, but of course provided no explanation - their aim being to terrify people into keeping away from a riot.

Add to this complicated picture this further dimension to the Newcastle riots. Blacks and "immigrants" on the street weren't attacked, but people speaking with southern English accents were. According to a friend residing in Newcastle, the home of a nurse from the south of England who worked in the local RVI hospital was burnt down. We have been unable to establish if this horrendous event is true or not as no one else has verified it. If true, then anti-southern hostility that's always been strong in the northeast in the 20th century has now been given a frightening twist. Of course its basis is a hatred of the brutal, free market Toryism centered in the southeast around London, but attacks like this are completely useless and counter-

towards them. It's even been said that some parents have encouraged their kids - young women among them - to join in the rioting. Certainly that hostility between older residents and wild noisy kids seems to have lessened somewhat. It was a gap that was nearly a chasm in the last round of urban uprisings in '85 when most estate tenants committees wanted more policing to curb vandalistic youth. This also seems to have given somewhat possibly because the police presence has gone over the top. Or perhaps, in addition, it's something simpler and more direct. There's a dawning realization that the cops aren't there to clear up small-time crime (or much crime at all come to that), on housing estates; crimes which can be devastating to poor residents. You know the familiar complaint: "the police are never there when you need them." Consequently, a form of self-organized patrolling or "vigilantism" (one must be careful about the way the press use the term) has come into existence whereby special patrols made up of adults (young dads as it were) hand out their own rough justice, and in so doing, transcend police functions of fines and jail sentences, etc. The estates in the South Yorkshire mining village of Grimethorpe were probably the first to initiate such moves whereby local burglars who rob their own are publicly denounced and given a good going over. The shame of such a thrashing is usually enough to stop the culprit. It since seems to have spread to many northern estates. The latest we know of is the Bierley estate in south Bradford. Such a presence so far doesn't seem to have interfered in the process of rioting although quite frankly one needs a lot more information before being really clear. Surely there must be some patrols who are all too keen on helping out the police? But let's hope generally it's heading in the right direction. Down on petty pilfering of poor people, but up with the great crime of revolution.

Also, particularly in the north, attitudes among older residents have changed the more they realize that there's nothing for youth any longer, that they really are, as the Americans term them, "McJobs." The rioters are even an object of pity. Equally, youth have moved somewhat in recognizing the plight of others next to them. For instance, just after the riots on the Ragworth estate in Stockton-on-Tees and in Burnley, there were reports of youths beating up opportunistic burglars caught trying to rob old people. A word of

caution: as yet it may not be much more than a faint tendency which could get rapidly snuffed-out.

For, let's face it, caring responses are getting fewer and deteriorating material circumstances scarcely help. The general drift of the capitalist mode of production is towards some sociopathy where the aim is each and everyone trying to hurt one another in some way. There is a particularly nasty psycho atmosphere pervading the UK. Perhaps it can be summed up through reference to the lack of a national ideological phrase like "liberty, equality, fraternity" is in France. Here it's "God Save the Queen" with two fingers up and a "fuck off" said with a mad glint in the eyes.

Therefore it's a pleasant surprise to note that the present riots, unlike those of '85, have been remarkably free of nasty incidents (with the exception of Newcastle which will be gone into later). In the rioting on the Blackbird Leys estate in Oxford in the summer of '91 some random and bloody stabbing was much spectacularized by the tabloid press. Later it was shown by some of the estates' residents that the incident had nothing to do with the riots. They also pointed out that some of the joy-riding stunts in the riots had been paid for by TV companies looking for good footage. Similarly with the rioting in Willenhall, Coventry in May '92. Around the same time a child was brutally murdered. The media played on subliminal suggestions hinting it was part and parcel of the riot. It was miles from the truth.

THE COPPERS, THE MINERS, THE VIDEO CAMERAS

Whether one gives an optimistic or pessimistic interpretation to tendencies present in the riots, there's no getting away from the fact that the far-flung estates have become the focus of a permanent police swamp operation. In the early '80s such urban swamp operations were the exception rather than the rule. Although there's the same police presence on big inner-city estates, the lucrative gains from drug dealing have possibly kept them, for the moment at least, reasonably calm - as well as doing-in black solidarity. Maybe, too, the cops are learning how to ease up, having, for instance, defused stone throwing incidents recently on the huge Stonebridge estate in north London

"liberate" their own. Again these incidents are hardly, if ever, reported. However, this story should be told by a libertarian Pakistani revolutionary but those that could are rather afraid to do so. For the moment, a brief sketch like the above gives some insight into the complicated veneer of UK racism, which is dissimilar to mainstream European racism.

It has, however, been said that in the riots over the last year there's been an occasional anti-Asian edge to the predominantly white participants. Many of the shops attacked by rioters were owned by Pakistanis. True, most were owned by them (or Chinese), but they were the only shops on the estates. There may have been substance to the allegation that it was racism that sparked the Cardiff "bread" riots, except for the fact that the Pakistani shop keeper who lit the fuse was a particularly nasty piece of work who'd regularly hand over shoplifters (even senior citizens) to the police. In any case, rioters of mixed race descent in both Cardiff and Newcastle clearly stated there was no racial motivation in their attacks. Amazingly, apart from one or two exceptions, the Left has tended to go along with this - one would at least have expected some heavy finger-wagging. Those that have emphasized a possibly grey area have been the Right, particularly judges in Newcastle accusing rioters of racism when handing down heavy sentences.

As per usual, stereotypical white racism though has come from the police. In the summer of '91 in Wellington in rural Shropshire, a black teenager who'd been in and out of psychiatric hospitals was killed by the cops for flaunting a toy pistol. The police knew about his record and knew he was harmless as did the local population. The black youth of the town rebelled for a few nights, even molotoving the police station. Rioting spread to the nearby warehousing, business park, small-factory new (postwar) town of Telford, where black, white, and Asian youth, acted together on a 3 night rampage.

To underline further the complex character of UK racism, consider the Blackburn riot of July '92 in the Whalley Range area of the town. Previously submissive Indians attacked a Pakistani store-cum-cafe which they reckoned discriminated against them. Fighting ensued between Pakistani and Indian youth. The cops arrived and the warring sides joined forces to fight the police.

and the commodity. What white racism that's viciously deployed is directed mainly against isolated individuals, largely refugees, cut-off from any entrenched community support network (e.g. against Afghans, Iranians, Kurds, etc). And, of course, seeing that it's something of a horrible trend (what with the massive movement of world populations underway) it could increase. Equally, if it does happen, it has to be strongly resisted.

An argument could be put forward (though one has to be careful about too much of an over-statement) that the one on-going nasty racism in the UK (and it does so often involve lighter versus darker skin) is an inter-Asian racism: Bengali against Punjabi, Sikh against Indian, Muslim against Hindu - just to give it an extra religious dimension too. It's hardly reported in the national press but it's often really bloody. Street fights which can last half an hour erupt when warring factions armed with knives and machetes end up literally fighting to the death in towns in West Yorkshire. In industrial Keighley, a violent town once noted for its right-wing "British Movement" contingent, the real heaviness now is between Pakistani and Bangladeshi. An ex-school teacher claimed that as soon as she left the classroom, Asian kids would square up to each other while the white kids remained passive onlookers. The conflicts would also spill over into the playground. Several villages transplanted wholesale from Pakistan to Keighley (the area is noted for its municipal sensitivity to immigration, having dealt with Germans, Jews, Poles, Italians, Slavs, and Ukrainians etc for more than a century) have also brought with them age-old feuds and the semblance of a rural Mafia. There is talk of hit men involved in local rivalries (and therefore not, strictly speaking, hired killers) being brought in from Pakistan to settle disputes and blow people away. West Yorkshire police are often baffled and their investigations lead nowhere, so closed is the vow of "omerta." Dissident Pakistani women are at risk for rather different reasons. Occasionally even well-meaning white women will help in the search for a "missing" girl before finally wising up, realizing she's a runaway, or, if older, possibly dead. It's standard practice in the Dewsbury (W.Yorks) women's refuge for abused Asian women to only stay one night. Sometimes the refuges get surrounded and windows broken by Asian men and even women relatives seeking to

and Peckham in south London. But then, they can just as quickly do an about turn and come on really heavy again.

Mining areas also have witnessed a number of riots, but sadly minus strikes. We know of quite a few incidents recently in the Yorkshire coalfield, the most prominent being four nights of rioting in Maltby in summer '91, in June '92 trouble in Knottingly, and, mindful of the media blank, where else? Memories of the year-long miners' strike of '84-85 haven't remotely gone away. In some ways the police occupation of mining towns hasn't let up with a clamp-down on all town youth. Its focus has changed, that's all.

To some degree, the intensification of the police presence everywhere can be related to the miners' strike. The old Public Order Act of 1936 was used against the miners, preventing them from travelling to various hot spots throughout the land. Two years later in 1986 it was toughened up under the 1986 Public Order Act whereby the cops were able to arrest anybody deemed a threat to law'n'order and a meeting of more than 2 people construed as a "public demonstration" liable to a fine. Contained within it was a new charge of "violent disorder" which could mean a prison sentence of up to 5 years and a charge of rioting resulting in a life sentence. It meant that any crowd from soccer hooligans, free festivals, acid house raves, to beach parties or too many tourists could be made-out as a threat to authority.

Thus there's a permanent police occupation with stop-and-search in the suburbs often worse than in the inner-cities. Everywhere, from pubs to city estates, police video cameras have been installed and there's a kind of permanent unofficial curfew on youth. After each incident the surveillance techniques are stepped up. Plush and boring Bournemouth beach on the south coast is now covered with police video cameras. No doubt it came about in response to the 1990 soccer hooligan disturbances there where, in one beautiful episode, youths took over the famous pier and occupied the pleasure dome.

In an atmosphere like this it is hardly surprising things have got really heavy. Following on from Broadwater Farm in '85, guns have been used against police and fire fighters during the riots in inner-city estates in Ordsall in the Manchester conurbation and in Leeds in June '92. Some of the guns are there because of the ruthless

competition inherent in a drug pushing gang structure, which are now occasionally being turned against the State's thin blue line (but please, not fire fighters). It probably means that at some point in the future there's going to be a shoot-out of sorts in a riot resulting in a fair number of deaths. What will it mean? A Rubicon crossed? Polarization, and workers behind the uprising?? Or nothing???... One development so far. Although the police everywhere are really tooled up, a lot of police chiefs, unlike Summer '81, are now sounding like the liberally-minded Sociology professors, condemning the spiralling militarism and blaming economic and social factors for all the trouble they're supposed to deal with. Does it mean a weakening of resolve come a real crunch?

There's a further twist. Unlike their chiefs, the police on the beat (at least on the estates) may perhaps be coming down heavy in order to scupper the government's privatization plans which seek to do away with the jobs-for-life police force, bringing in contract work, merit wages, and giving greater emphasis to private agencies like Securicor (or even Pinkertons who are cheaper and whose employees are on much lower rates of pay). The beat copper coming on strong, provoking incidents, will show the free-market mandarins "you can't do without us."

But what exactly characterizes the present rioting? There's nothing remotely ideological to it - not even some ill-fitting black consciousness that was there in '81 or in '85. The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and anarchist Class War have handed out leaflets on the estates - often while the events were taking place or in the process of dying down, but can one make much out of it? The newspapers, particularly the intellectuals' gutter press, pick up on Class War - but as for the actual residents' responses... well, that remains fairly unknown. Generally it's the local Labour Party councillors and "community worker" cadres who condemn Class War, possibly because they drink in the same pubs and receive a ritualistic slagging-off from Class War types every now and again... (well, if London's Notting Hill is anything to go by).

COLOR, BLINDNESS, VISION

The rioting is nearly without any vision: things have been just so bad it almost seems that vision is for those with some kind of privilege. Connecting links even to other estates just aren't really there; each is going up in isolation separate in time and distance from one another with no solidaristic thread between them, and strangely at odds with the solidarity practiced within the estate. It's like as though the parameters of the rioters' world ends with the estate. This is to be expected as they are miles from the town center and deregulated bus fares are an utter ripoff. Youths are often penniless, unable to go anywhere but the estate, having often been denied all benefit, welfare relief or place on a training scheme. Contrary to all the "feather-bedding" welfare claptrap, the UK has the lowest level of welfare support in the highly developed world. Even Spain and America rank surprisingly higher in pay-outs although benefits are more limited and harder to obtain. The situation is so closed down - infinitely so in comparison to 10 years ago - that it may explain why localism, incapacitating though it may be, is so pronounced.

In fact it's localism that's much more of a problem than racism. Something has been made out of increasing racism in the UK (for example the Trotskyist SWP has revived the Anti-Nazi League of the late '70s) but where's the real evidence for spreading racism on any generalized scale? There hasn't been a fascist revival of any significance, and racial tolerance, especially within England, is still far stronger. In some ways there's even been a decline in anti-Asian racism since the mid-80s, although that's still palpably there. Occasional brutal murders of Asians take place by white racists but young Asians for sometime have refused to take it lying down, even resorting to indiscriminately beating up whites in response. It's been said recently that the St. John's ward of Halifax, West Yorkshire is a "no-go area" for whites, though it's been hotly denied by St. John's Asians. All depending - this type of "racism" is fluid. Blacks often prefer whites to Asians, etc. Indeed, some very unpleasant anti-Asian responses can come from Blacks and there's by no means a simplistic unity to be conjured up. Unity over the last 11 years has tended to come through action; the action of rioting against the police, the State